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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, February 24, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "BEAUTY TREATMENTS FOR CITRUS FRUITS." Information from the Food and Drug Administration, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Some girls have rosy cheeks because nature made them that way. Others have cheeks just as bright without the help of nature. Oranges are somewhat the same nowadays.

The reason why beauty treatments were first applied to some oranges and, to a lesser extent, to grapefruit, was that people judge the quality of these fruits mainly by their color. At some seasons of the year some varieties of oranges or grapefruit, even though they are ripe, are not of the full color that consumers associate with ripeness. Fruit of these varieties when ripe sometimes has green pigment in the skin, and the green pigment covers over the yellow or orange pigments.

Growers of such varieties faced a problem: How to bring ripe fruit to the color that buyers associated with ripeness. They found that holding the fruit in warm, damp storage rooms improved the color. They tried treating the fruit with exhaust fumes of gasoline engines, or the fumes of partially burned kerosene. These treatments improved color, but created fire hazards or harmed the flavor of the fruit. Then chemists got busy and found that ethylene gas was the constituent in these fumes which removed the green and allowed the yellow and orange pigment to show in the skin of the fruit.

State and Federal marketing and food control officials looked into the matter and found that the treatment with ethylene did not harm the fruit, but might be deceptive to buyers if it was used on fruit that was not in fact ripe but that by degreening with the gas was made to appear ripe. They set up the rule that oranges degreened and made to appear ripe, but which were not ripe according to the minimum official standard -- 8 parts of sugar to 1 part of acid -- should not be sent to market, or if they reached market should be seized. The progressive members of the citrus fruit industry realized the disadvantage to their business of allowing the shipment of inferior fruit under a color disguise and cooperated in the enforcement of the regulations, State and Federal. That is the present relationship of food and marketing law enforcement to degreening of oranges with ethylene gas.

In 1934 a method of coloring oranges artificially was taken up by the citrus industry in certain sections, and is now being used on most of the oranges sent to market from those sections. This method is to give the fruit a bath in a harmless coal tar dye, so that it comes out a bright, even, orange color. This process differs from the ethylene gas treatment in that it makes the skin of the fruit a brighter yellow or orange color than it would naturally be. The ethylene treatment removes the green pigments and thus uncovers the yellow or orange pigments which occur naturally in the variety of oranges treated.

Consumers have complained that the dyeing practice deceived them, although each dyed orange bears stamped on its peel the legend, "Color Added." This legend is required by the Federal Food and Drugs Administration.

The relation between enforcement of the Federal Food and Drugs Act and this practice of dyeing oranges has been explained in a recent statement sent to growers and shippers of citrus fruits by Secretary Wallace of the United States Department of Agriculture. So that our listeners may know the exact situation at present, we quote this statement: It says:

"The application of yellow and orange coal-tar dyes to the peel of oranges had its inception in 1934. On July 16, 1934, the Department warned the citrus industry that the use of artificial color must be disclosed to the consumer by a conspicuous statement on each orange, and that concealment of inferiority or damage of the fruit by the added color would be in violation of the Food and Drugs Act regardless of color declaration.

"The Department was not able to complete its investigations as to the concealment of inferiority during the fruit season ending in the spring of 1935. In the meantime the installation of elaborate color processing machinery has been extensive, and the staining of oranges by added color has become well-nigh universal in certain producing sections. A very large number of consumer protests against the practice of staining by addition of color has reached the Department. Their purport is that purchasers are being deceived by such staining even under the required informative labeling. It has always been held that oranges which were so unripe as to fall below the standard of 8 parts of sugar to 1 of acid were inherently inferior, and that coloring of such oranges by any method is a violation of the Food and Drugs Act. Action is taken under the Food and Drugs Act against such fruit wherever encountered in interstate commerce and also against its shippers.

"Sufficient information is now available to conclude that the staining of oranges complying with the 8 to 1 standard, in simulation of oranges of greater maturity and flavor or of superior variety, is also in violation of the Food and Drugs Act.

"..... On and after September 1, 1936, action under Section 10 of the Food and Drugs Act will be taken against interstate shipments of oranges so stained and under section 2 of that Act against the shippers on the ground that inferiority is concealed."

There you have the statement by Secretary Wallace concerning the enforcement of the Federal Food and Drugs Act in relation to the interstate shipment of dyed oranges.

Federal Food and Drug officials feel that starting next September the new procedure in law enforcement should reduce consumer complains of deception by the dyeing of oranges. They point out that in the meantime consumers may examine the skin of oranges to see if the legend "color added" appears there; then remember that dyed oranges are not necessarily of the same variety nor as ripe as oranges whose natural color is the same as that of the dyed oranges.

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